

7-16-1977

## Interview no. 1748

Gisela Avalos

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## THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Gisela Avalos

Interviewer: IOH

Project: Farah

Location: El Paso, Tx

Date of Interview: July 16, 1977

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Transcript No.: 1748

Transcriber: Roberto Cristoforo

### **Summary of Interview:**

Her name is Gisela Avalos and she was fighting in the strike in May 9<sup>th</sup>. She says that they were fighting for their rights that she knew they were violating them. She also mentions that she had a husband in that time and he accepted to leave her because she needed to become a new person. She says that at the beginning they wouldn't do anything about the company violating their rights, but they got tired and they went to the union to protest for women rights, but many men won't listen to them and that had to be change. She says that when the strike was going on, she left her company and she says that leaving the company she was working for was a great thing to do because she needed that. She says that at the union there were a lot of men and they will make fun of her for doing stuff that usually men do. She says that cleaning was one of her duties during that time and they had to scruff the floor and she will get really tired of doing that and there was no way to stop.

They will get ignore when they tell their supervisors something related to basic rights and they will just continue as if nothing was said. She says that there was woman that would not resign from their job and would not protest because their income depends on that job; some women will not undusted that what was going on was a rights violation, they will work long hours at least 4 days a week and with lower wage and even with those reasons they won't understand. The protest they were doing where for women rights and many women will only sign a paper and not protesting or missing work and that was something that affected their way to communicate what they were trying to do, that was have equal rights and wage. She says that the company she was working for

would not let her take vacation and she argued with her supervisors and when she came back from her vacation, they didn't let her get back in work as she was and they will send letter to her knowing she was out of town. She says that she had to speak to the supervisor a couple of times before they gave her permission to work regularly as she was doing but she knew they were doing that on purpose so that she misses work and don't get paid. She will advise her family and relatives to go to college because she didn't have the opportunity but they can have one and they should definitely do it.

When she was working at a company, they union will say that 3 dollars was too much pay for a woman and she says that those 3 dollars were miserable in those days. There were people complaining and other people won't say anything because they were scared to get fired. One time she went to complain and the supervisor was on drugs and you can smell it and she says that that was crazy to think about because he was making so much more money than her and that was ironically right to people at the union.

She remembers the time when the first Mexican supervisor, and she says that in order to be supervisor you need to come from the bottom and of course be a man so that people don't complain about it. Even thou there was a lot of Mexican people, there are some of them that don't like the idea of someone Mexican getting a better position than them being Americans so they will get comments like "go back to your country" but they will answer that they were born in the US. People will offer receive racist comments for either being a woman or being Mexican.

The strike lasted for months and when they look back to it, they don't regret doing that. She says that many people lost their homes or their cars and even they marriage but things needed to be done. They will experience harassment during their shift and no one will notice because they were into their own things and that was one of the reasons they were striking. She says that if they needed to strike again, she will do it without a doubt. She says that the strike was worth it and it is a way to get people to hear you if they are not understanding what it's going on. She will try to motivate everyone to keep going on and she will be friendly to everyone who was her coworkers even think when they were rude to her. She says that there was a woman that disliked her for no reason and she will be friendly to her and that woman was very rude to her but at the end they became friends because she was being nice to her. She will get laugh at when she will tell other supervisors what they had to do to get things better for the employees.

When she realized that many employees were doing high risks jobs that they didn't have any experience for and they will get injured and they company won't care. She will not accept that treatment from the company or any supervisor and she will speak what she was feeling and she says that some people didn't like that but it is the right thing to do. She says that many people will be against the union even though there were people that were against that. She says that being a minority in a big company, you will be exposed to be fired for the smallest thing and sometimes not getting paid, just for being a woman. She says that being from a Mexican family they will have root of hard work and you are expected to be a hard-working person and give your family what they need and helping them do what they want to become in live, but sometimes being a Mexican woman will affect the outcome because they won't let you do things like men do, for example be a labor worker and eventually get to the top.

When she first become a mother, it was hard for her because she was very protective with their children and she will get very nervous when they were playing alone because she had that mother instinct. She mentions that she wants their children to be free and let them be what they want to be and help them all the way. She says that the education she gave them was not the typical of only respect the man of the house, she taught them to be equally respectful, without looking if it's a male or a female. She taught her son how to do "women duty" like washing dishes or cleaning the house or help their sister to do some work. She has a maiden that will help her with the kids during the week and the maiden id from Ciudad Juarez and she is helping her paying her in dollars and trying to pay her more than the minimum wage, and she treats her like another family member, because she can stay if she needs it or eat something or even watch TV. She says that being a mother will change the way you do things, for example going to party's and drinking alcohol is not a choice anymore because show knows she is an example for her children.

She says that at her job she will do all the secretary work and she realized that they wanted women suing that job because is something was wrong; they can blame her. She says that a friend of her had the same position at other company and one day money was missing and they blamed her and forced her to pay from her pocket without knowing if it was her fault or if someone else stole that money from the company. She says that these treatments are unacceptable and this still happens now not only back in the day. She says that the strike was something that was misunderstood in that moment because people will only think women were the problem but they were only fighting for their rights. She says that in those days the wage they were getting was barely to survive, because bills will get higher and the wage not. She mentions that she had no type of credit and her son needed medical attention but she had no way to pay for that, so she went to her supervisor and she did not help her and she knew how bad the situation was, because she has worked in that union for years and now, they are not helping her, and everything she was asking for it was a check for her sons' medication and she got nothing. She says that being a mother in that situation was very unconformable because she had a lot of anger inside of her. Later that year the person that did not helped her was striking with her and for her that was no adding up, but she knew this was award for every woman.

She is talking about the amount of work and the difficulty it had when she was a machine operator, because it takes years to learn how to property use a machine, because every machine it was different and sometimes, they needed to know how to use other machines. She says that the machines had needles that were very tiny and they needed to sew with those, and it was not an easy job. She says that if a machine stopped working, they will have to use a tool that was harder to use and it took more time and labor and sometimes the machines won't even fix them. The conditions that they worked in were unacceptable, because they will sometimes have to takt their own tools to do the job, because the supervisors won't care, but they had to do their job. She says that the union was supposed to be for the people but they were only working for their own benefit. She says that the church will support the strikes, because all of them were fighting for human rights. She says that many people will join the strike even if they were not a part of the union, because many people had family working in there and they were supporting them in the protest. She says that those types of actions are the ones that makes you realize how united they can be as a community. She mentions that you need to fight for what you believe.

Length of interview 3:11:30

Length of Transcript \_\_\_\_\_